

MPP steps up lobby for rail link stops in Weston

GO line environmental assessment now headed by Metrolinx

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York South-Weston MPP Laura Albanese is calling on the provincial crown agency responsible for the Environmental Assessment (EA) of the new rail link between Union Station and Pearson International Airport to have stops in Weston and be built below grade to alleviate disruption to residents.

In an announcement Monday, Dec. 15, Metrolinx was named the new proponent of the expansion of the GO service on the Georgetown line and will manage the EA portion of the project.

The expansion of the GO line will include service to Etobicoke, Bramalea, Brampton and Georgetown, along with the rail link from Union Station on Front Street downtown to the airport in Mississauga.

Albanese, an outspoken critic of the plan to build a non-stop, high-speed train through Weston, wrote a letter to Metrolinx chair Rob MacIsaac stating that the current plans would do more harm than good for Weston residents by permanently shutting certain streets and failing to serve the community.

But if a rail link is going ahead, Albanese would like to see a stop included in Weston and have it built below grade to avoid road closures.

"Any such service should include a stop in Weston, which would have the impact of reducing speed through the corridor and provide new and regular service to our community," Albanese wrote. "Local residents must benefit from not only a stop, but also from access to this new service through a reasonable fare system... it is absolutely vital that all residents who wish to comment on the transit EA process are given the opportunity to be heard."

Albanese would also like the EA to address safety, noise and pollution concerns in the community.

Mike Sullivan, chair of the Weston Community Coalition, said residents have struggled with the project for more than four years.

The issues, he said, centre around road closures, the use of diesel to fuel the trains, and the lack of stops along the route.

If roads are permanently closed there would be a "ghost town in Weston," Sullivan said.

"The business area is along Weston Road and if you cut off access to Weston Road, people will shop elsewhere," he said.

Running the trains on diesel fuel will cause significant pollution concerns, he said, adding the trains should run on electricity.

"There are hundreds of residents abutting the tracks along Weston Road," he said. "And if the train is going to run through Toronto, it needs to stop in the communities it will go through, including Weston, the Junction, Mount Dennis and Liberty Village. It should run below grade to avoid any road closures."

Colleen Bell, general manager of community relations and initiatives for Metrolinx, said open houses will be scheduled in the spring to hear from residents, adding a non-stop route is not definite.

"We want to get feedback and will be working closely with concerned residents," she said, adding a construction schedule is not yet available.

The Georgetown expansion is part of the GO Transit Rail Improvement Program, a \$1-billion expansion initiative funded by the federal and provincial governments and local municipalities through the Canada Strategic Infrastructure Fund.